



City of Somerville
PLANNING BOARD
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

15 APRIL 2021 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Sam Dinning	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Charlotte Leis (Planning & Zoning), Rebecca Lyn Cooper (Planning & Zoning), Daniel Bartman (Planning & Zoning), and Sarah Lewis (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 9:07pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 71-72 Union Square
(continued from 1 April 2021)

Attorney Adam Dash presented and discussed the rendering requested by the Board at the last meeting. He also noted that the team had also provided a fully executed Green Line Extension development covenant.

The Board and the applicant team discussed the building design as it relates to the abutting buildings, the height of the first floor windows and canopy, and the required fenestration.

The Board discussed an added condition regarding shielding the upper portion of the first floor windows, and motioned to include that condition in their decision.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted (4-1, with Rob Buchanan voting against) to approve the Site Plan Approval with conditions, including the additional conditions added during the meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the use Special Permit with Conditions.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

PUBLIC HEARING: 120-132 Middlesex Avenue
(continued from 1 April 2021)

Kyle Greaves stated that the applicant team had been working on development covenant, but it is not yet finalized or executed. The applicant team requested a continuance to a future meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to April 29, 2021

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 3 Hawkins Street

(continued from 18 February 2021)

Peter Quinn presented updates to the project and the design changes, noting that the Urban Design Commission's recommended design is more contemporary than the previous, more traditional design. Mr Quinn also discussed the updated landscape plan.

Staff noted that during the additional design review and neighborhood meeting, outstanding issues presented included updated sidewalk design, improved crosswalks, preferred street trees over frontage planters, and the possibility of a raised intersection. Neighbors also provided feedback recommending that the building corner should project out further than the rest of the building to be in line with the window bays.

The Board discussed the street trees, building materials, color choices, enhancing the side entrance facing the park, and the possibility of adding some public art. The Board asked the applicant team to present different design options at the next meeting, including color options and massing choices.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to April 29, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 240 Elm Street

Attorney Sean O'Donovan provided a history of the applicant, the location, and the timeline of the proposal. Dwan Packnett introduced Sira Naturals as a company, its community values, staffing practices, community benefits, payments, and partnership with the City.

Michelle Foley discussed the physical features of the current design, scope of design needed to accommodate the new use, staffing and training, and security measures.

Steven Siragusa presented the Transportation Impact Study and the Transportation Access Plan and discussed the findings.

Sean O'Donovan confirmed the details of the appointment-only agreement. Staff confirmed the details of the procedure for converting to walk-in service at a later date.

Chair Capuano noted that the Board had received a number of written testimonies prior to this evening's meeting, and opened the hearing for public testimony.

Alexandra Stepoe (5 School Street) is the union steward and works for Sira Naturals. Ms. Stepoe noted that Sira invited the union in and sets the standard for safety. She loves working in Somerville and is in support of this proposal.

Gabriel Camacho (United Food & Commercial Workers Local 1445, 30 Stergis Way) is the political director of food workers (UFCW). Mr. Camacho noted that Sira is committed to racial justice and equity. He felt that good union jobs, with good representation, were needed in Somerville. He is in support of this proposal.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Chair Capuano left written testimony open until April 23, 2021.

The Board asked the applicant to clarify a note that was included in the public records from previous meetings that Sira Naturals would be tailoring to specific clientele. The applicant confirmed that Sira Naturals will serve any legal customer and all are welcome at all times. Staff commented that the note was in reference to the joint neighborhood meeting minutes, with the Harvest Club, about proximity to each other and a comment that was made by a member of the public regarding if each dispensary plans to cater to different customers.

The Board and applicant discussed the transition process from strictly medical to also providing adult use.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to April 29, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 255 Elm Street

Christopher Vining provided an introduction to the Harvest Club, background of the owners, hiring policies, diversion and inventory control procedures, commitment to social equity, and packaging strategies to reduce waste and encourage recycling.

Alexander Coon discussed the site and storefront, security measures, floor plan including community room and waiting area, social distancing policy, storefront art gallery, transit benefits for employees, bike parking, and plans for the schedule.

Attorney Anne Vigorito presented the team including the owners, and gave an overview of the presubmittal steps including the neighborhood meetings.

Steve Siragusa presented the Transportation Impact Study and the Transportation Access Plan and discussed the findings.

Paul Verruto discussed the detailed alarm system and the security plan.

The Board and the applicant team discussed the previous neighborhood meeting and the other adult-use dispensaries in close proximity. Chair Capuano had concerns about permitting similar businesses in the same area, for example liquor stores. Staff noted that they could provide a map of where the Host Community Agreements have been permitted so far. The applicant understood the concern of the Board, but noted the draw of Davis Square and the difficulties faced by other retail establishments, as well as reviewed the many community benefits that they have planned for the area and Somerville as a whole.

Staff provided the Host Community Agreements map and discussed the details of locations which either have or have not received permits yet.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Robert and Micah Gorin (255 Elm Street) have been in Davis Square for 75 years and in Somerville for 100 years. They have managed this building for 35 years and noted that competition is the best way to keep squares active. If there is no competition, the businesses are complacent. They felt that all of the cannabis stores should be allowed to open, as they can all contribute and thrive.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written testimony was left open until April 23, 2021.

Joe Lynch (Somerville Licensing Commission) was not in favor or against the proposal but wanted to provide some insight regarding the clustering issue posed by the Chair. He reported that he had worked hand in hand with the Land Use Committee and the City Council on crafting the legislation and noted that

the committees grappled with the clustering issue. It was thought at the time that because of the size of Somerville and the location restrictions, it would not make sense to include a clustering clause. The legislation is written to direct that dispensaries should be treated as would any controlled or highly-regulated substances, as for example, the Commission cannot prohibit anyone from asking for beer and wine or liquor licenses, and can't control where package stores go with regard to each other. They can, however, restrict their locations based on proximity to schools, daycare centers, and parks where children congregate. There were no significant voices of opposition when the three previous licenses were granted around Davis Square. The Board, Mr. Lynch, and Staff discussed the cap on package stores and the number of licenses granted so far.

The Board and the applicant discussed the floor plan and the Board requested that the updated plans be provided prior to the next meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to April 29, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Hiring Consultants Under M.G.L. Ch. 44, Sec. 53G

Director Lewis reported she did not yet have a scope of work to share with the Board, but that she would provide it to the Board when it was available.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.